

compassion - connection - courage - belonging

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
April 1, 2011
In Favor of HB 6638; In Opposition to SB 1164
Danielle Chiaraluce
Families United, Executive Director**

Good afternoon chairs and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Danielle Chiaraluce, Executive Director of Families United. We are a community based advocacy organization comprised of family members and professionals who uphold the value of facilitating sustainable resources and services to families, children, and youth. Our involvements are widespread, consistently focused on the ever-changing needs of families to support healthy and safe communities across the state.

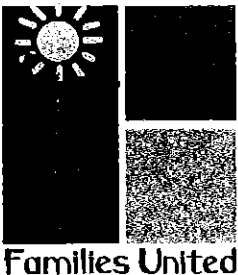
I am writing in favor of HB 6638 and in opposition of SB 1164, particularly in the wake of research that points toward the benefit of cost effective, community based services.

Having worked within the field of alternative education for at-risk youth, both within and out of the criminal justice system, I know first-hand the impact an adult record can have upon a young adult. Their future as a contributing member within the workforce, or within post secondary education, can be hindered.

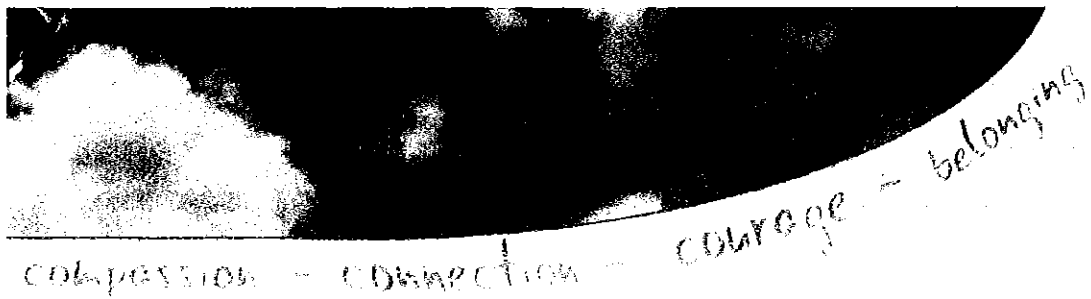
Exposure to pro-social, strength based, and family driven programming can support a seamless transition into an accepting community. Services such as vocational training, after school programs, community service learning projects, and proactive resources have potential for cost savings and, more importantly, family and youth empowerment.

Connecticut was able to 'Raise the Age' for 16 year olds in 2010. I can personally attest from working that this change promoted personal and career development and lowered the propensity for recidivism. When quality resources and engagement strategies are properly implemented, the results are safer and healthier communities. This requires sustainable family and community driven programs.

I have worked with at risk youth within alternative incarceration programs and vocational education for more than fifteen years. Many young adults have been extremely successful. They have gone on to renovate our cities, support administrative functions in key industries, and demonstrate community leadership. However, in each instance, the greatest barrier to their success was their adult record that precluded them from involvement within the healthcare



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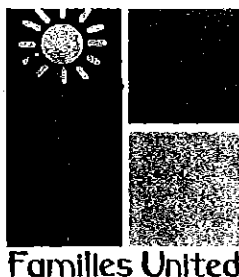


industry, posed a barrier to employment, disqualified them from housing programs, and later required costly legal fees to expunge their record in order to simply find a means to provide for themselves and their family.

On a personal note, as a crime victim, I have experienced the tragic consequences of recidivism. Therefore, whereas I support **HB 6638**, I firmly agree with Results Based Accountability measures for any potential provider that seeks to serve this population. Services need to be trauma informed, family-driven, gender responsive, and community based. Whereas each youth may enter the system for a different reason, we must also note there is a commonality amongst them; they are often themselves victims of crime. Their adverse childhood experiences, whether by witness or experience, promote a host of risk factors that include alleged delinquency, substance abuse, and poor academic achievement.

These youth deserve quality education and proactive, not reactive, program services. Collaboration across systems is essential, but more essential, is involving youth and family in the decision making process. Many states and localities have already 'Raised the Age' of adulthood. In our community, this legislation has the support of families, providers, educators, community residents, and industry professionals. We recognize that **HB 6638** protects the health and well-being of our young people and other at-risk populations and request your attention to this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



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